

**Preparation Guidelines
for the Celebration of the
Sacrament of Confirmation**



**Diocese of Lexington
Lexington, KY**

2008

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History

In October 2006, Bishop Gainer asked that the Office of Religious Education assemble a task force to develop guidelines for Confirmation preparation for the Diocese of Lexington. These guidelines represent the fruit of this directive.

The first step in this process was to survey the parishes within the diocese as to current practices such as frequency of the celebration of the sacrament, length of preparation, age of candidates, and textbooks employed. Roughly 30 parishes responded to the survey.

The survey results became one of the points of discussion in a series of regional meetings that occurred over the next few months. Priests, Parish Life Directors, DRE's/CRE's and Catechists attended these meetings and added their perspectives regarding the state of preparation programs, the challenges preparation programs face, and their hopes for the work of the task force.

The final step was to form the task force. The task force met over a period of several months. Through discussion, study, and drawing on a wealth of experience, the following seven components were identified and accepted as forming the basis for solid and consistent Confirmation preparation:

1. Catechetical Content
2. Discipleship through Service & Ministry
3. Retreat
4. Parent/Parish Participation
5. Sponsor
6. Catechist Formation
7. Relationship with the Bishop

These guidelines expound these seven components. It is the hope of the Bishop and the task force that parishes find these guidelines to be a useful tool in the ever-continuing work to strengthen our sacramental preparation programs and in bringing a sense of unity to the Confirmation preparation programs in the Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lexington.

The Diocese of Lexington expresses its gratitude for the time, talent and effort given by the task force members:

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Pam Berger, St. Peter
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Rose Watt, St. Joseph
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Beth Murner, Holy Spirit

Note to Pastors & Parish Priests

In addition to all parish leadership, the participation of the pastor and/or parish priest in the Confirmation preparation program is crucial to its success. Consequently, pastors and parish priests are asked to consider the following as opportunities to support and strengthen the parish preparation program:

- ✚ Teaching a class
- ✚ Spending time with the candidates during preparation classes
- ✚ Setting aside special times to answer questions candidates may have

These are just a few of the ways that pastors & parish priests can contribute to strong preparation programs and reinforce the significance of what the candidates are about to celebrate.

Policy Regarding Age of Candidates

In the Diocese of Lexington, candidates for Confirmation must be at least in the **Fifth Grade*** of school. The Bishop will consider exceptions in only the most extraordinary circumstances.

*This policy **does not** apply to children seven (7) years old or older at the time of Baptism. In such cases, Canon Law dictates that a child receives his/her Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil in accordance with the Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) adapted for Children. For more information regarding RCIA adapted for Children, please contact the Diocesan Office of Worship.

STATEMENT ON THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

The Catholic Church of the Diocese of Lexington understands the sacrament of Confirmation to be a freely given gift of God that perfects Baptismal grace. The life of Christian witness involves ongoing, life-long formation, frequent reception of the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist, an ever-deepening prayer life, and faithful witness of the Good News of Jesus Christ through loving service to all people.

Confirmation perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds.

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1316

I. Catechetical Content

Program Requisite: Each Confirmation preparation program within the Diocese of Lexington will ensure that candidates receive specific instruction regarding the nature of Confirmation and the significance of its reception.

Rationale: The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist together constitute the “sacraments of initiation,” whose unity must be safeguarded. Parents of children and youth preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation should be properly instructed that “by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1285.) and that reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation is never to be considered a goal which is earned but a gift freely given. However, in order to properly receive and respond to this gift guidelines for preparation are necessary.

Guidelines for addressing the Program Requisite:

Candidates should demonstrate an understanding of the following elements appropriate to their specific grade level:

1. **Gathering as Church:** What it means to be an active member of the Church community; why is this important in view of Confirmation; etc.
2. **Proclaiming of Sacred Scripture:** What do we mean by Liturgy of the Word; when does it take place; why is this important within the context of Confirmation; etc.
3. **Renewing of Baptismal Promises:** What are baptismal promises; why is this part of Confirmation; what are their relationship to the Creed; etc.
4. **Laying on of Hands:** What is the Liturgical use of Laying on of Hands; what is the Scriptural understanding; where and why does this take place within the celebration of the sacrament; etc.
5. **Anointing with Chrism:** What is the meaning of this practice; what does it mean to be sealed with the Holy Spirit; what are the gifts of the Holy Spirit; where and why does this take place within the celebration of the sacrament; etc.
6. **Sharing the Gift of Peace:** What does this practice signify; how does it demonstrate a commitment to communicating and living out the Peace of Christ; where does this take place within the celebration of the sacrament; etc.
7. **Eucharist:** What is the relationship between Confirmation and Eucharist; how do we understand the Eucharist as a life-changing encounter with Christ; what does it mean to receive the Body & Blood of Christ; where does this take place within the celebration of the sacrament; etc.
8. **Mission:** What does it mean to be sent forth; how are the gifts of the Holy Spirit lived out in mission; what are Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy; why are they important within the context of Confirmation; etc.
9. **The Bishop as the Ordinary Minister of Confirmation:** How did the Bishop’s role as the ordinary minister of Confirmation develop; What is the ministry of Bishops in the Church?

II. Discipleship through Service & Ministry

Program Requisite: Each preparation program within the Diocese of Lexington will include service learning, service experience opportunities and service reflection.

Rationale: Confirmation calls the individual to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. This discipleship is manifested through membership in the Catholic Church. As a disciple (follower of Christ) one is called to put all of one's gifts and talents at the service of Christ in order to build the Kingdom of God within the parish, the local community and the world at large. This is the very meaning of Initiation – it is not passive reception of information but the active living out of our life in Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is being formed in the very likeness of Christ Jesus. The Candidates for Confirmation will be sent forth from Confirmation to go and share all that God has given them. It will not be enough to say, “Yes, Lord, I want to follow you.” They will be called to put these words into action.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms the rationale for this requisite when it states

For “by the sacrament of Confirmation. [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.” (1285)

Guidelines for addressing the Program Requisite:

1. Service Learning
 - a. It is of utmost importance that service learning precedes service experiences so that the Confirmation Candidate can come to understand the “why” of service. A connection needs to be made to the reason that Christians are called to “feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked...” in order to set the “stage” for the service experiences
 - b. Service Learning includes but is not limited to:
 - i. The rubrics of liturgy
 - ii. The infrastructure of parish life with an introduction to the workings of the candidate's parish including administration, finance, committee work, fundraising endeavors, social activities, etc.
 - iii. Social justice education
 - iv. An understanding of the difference between service and charity with an emphasis placed on the call to serve
 - c. Service Learning is best carried out in a retreat setting where conversion of the heart is more easily attained. However, Service Learning can also be incorporated into regular class times
 - d. Diocesan resources, for example from the Office of Peace and Justice, might be utilized in this area

II. Discipleship through Service & Ministry (continued)

2. Service Experience

- a. Service Experiences that expose the Confirmation candidate to the three areas of service opportunity – the Candidate’s parish, the local community and the world at large – are expected. In addition, at least one of the service opportunities should expose the Candidate to a new cultural experience – something to which he or she is not usually exposed (ie. homeless, low income, African-American, Hispanic, Eastern Kentucky, etc.)
- b. Where possible these should be carried out as group experiences, inviting parents, sponsors and adult members of the parish to join in the activities so that the idea of life-long service may be emphasized
- c. Examples of service experiences in each of the three areas follow:
 - i. Candidate’s Parish
 - ✎ participation in liturgy as a server, lector, musician, usher
 - ✎ involvement in a fundraising activity
 - ✎ assisting with a social activity – serving food, setting up, decorating, cleaning up
 - ✎ assisting with a formation class for younger children
 - ii. Local Community (**Note:** This should be directed to service to **PEOPLE**.)
 - ✎ soup kitchen
 - ✎ food bank
 - ✎ helping at a nursing home
 - ✎ helping at a hospital
 - ✎ visiting shut-ins
 - ✎ lawn care for elderly or shut-ins
 - iii. World at Large*
 - ✎ Catholic Relief Services (eg. Rice Bowl Project)
 - ✎ Invisible Children
 - ✎ Heifer Project

* Be careful that this does not become just a charitable contribution. The service lies in becoming educated about the cause, spreading the word as to why the cause is one to support, organizing a collection for the cause, and then getting the money or goods to the intended cause.

- d. A variety of offerings is good as more choice means more likelihood that the individual Candidate might have the particular gift/talent for a given service opportunity
- e. Be mindful to not overburden the Candidates – remember that young people have many activities in their lives. This service experience should result in the young person wanting to do more not less

II. Discipleship through Service & Ministry (continued)

3. Service Reflection

- a. Service Experiences would be incomplete for Confirmation Candidates if they did not include an opportunity for reflection following the activity. Thus, these opportunities need to be provided
- b. Reflection:
 - i. Allows time to explore the feelings behind the actions of service
 - ii. Allows for discussion of both the positive and negative aspects of service and gives the candidate the opportunity to ask questions that further clarify the “why” of service
 - iii. Offers the opportunity to encourage a life-long commitment to service and allows for immediate planning of follow-up service experiences
 - iv. Fosters the candidate’s enthusiasm thus ensuring that the work begun in Confirmation continues long after the Rite of Confirmation is celebrated

III. Retreat

Program Requisite: Each preparation program within the Diocese of Lexington will include a retreat component.

Rationale: The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states

Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit – his actions, his gifts, and his biddings – in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. (1309)

Further, in the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the USCCB recommends that parishes should present catechesis that “is developmentally appropriate and includes retreat experiences”. (p. 123)

Guidelines for addressing the Program Requisite:

The basis of a retreat experience, whether it is a few hours, a day, a weekend, or several retreats is to “retire” or move away from day to day activities in order to give oneself up to the moving of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If we are to form a “more intimate union with Christ” we should follow his example by retreating from the world from time to time to pray and listen in an atmosphere that is less distracting.

A good retreat should involve prayer, meditation, and worship experiences. Any age group is able to, if done appropriately, participate in and be evangelized by such an experience.

A Confirmation retreat should also be able to lead people of any age toward a greater understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit and how all the Sacraments of Initiation bring them into full participation in the life of the Church.

There should be certain basic elements of a Confirmation retreat no matter what the time or age constraints:

1. **Prayer** is essential to a retreat and can be experienced in a number of ways – through worship experiences (liturgy, prayer services, Eucharistic Adoration), meditation, journaling, song, etc
2. **Sacrament of Reconciliation** provides a reminder of the limitless mercy of God and our need to be forgiven and to begin again, renewed in spirit and love for ourselves and each other. Children should have ample chance to prepare through an appropriate examination of conscience and a review of the “how-to” of the sacrament
3. **Community Building** should permeate the activities of the retreat. Each person should understand that not only is he or she a child of God, but that *all* are blessed and deserving of our friendship, respect, and love. This can be done by forming small groups for the various activities, by allowing for “managed” free time which gives opportunities for the retreatants to learn about each other, and through icebreakers or other games

III. Retreat (continued)

4. **Witness** is an important element of a retreat. It allows each person to listen to stories of faith from peers and/or from respected adults. In listening, they are able to connect their own faith story with that of the other person and the story of the people of God told in Scripture and Church Tradition

Note: When anyone witnesses we recommend beginning with a scripture verse or story of a saint that relates to the witness' own story.

5. **Catechesis** in a retreat experience should have the purpose of preparing the retreatants for the Rite of Confirmation. The symbols of the ritual and their meaning should be explored as well as what it means to be a Catholic confirmed in faith. The gifts of the Holy Spirit that are strengthened in them as they are confirmed should also be opened up and explained

Note: The retreatants should begin to understand that knowing, loving and serving God and Church is a lifelong endeavor and that Confirmation is a beginning of that journey.

6. **Parish Community Involvement** is essential as all sacraments are communal in nature. Therefore, the entire parish should participate as much as possible in the retreat, particularly through private and communal prayer. The youth should be known to the parish. The parish should pray for candidates by having candidate pictures and/or names placed where they can be seen and the parish should send letters or notes of encouragement and faith to the candidates

Note: Prayers of the Faithful at the weekend masses should include a prayer for a fruitful retreat experience.

IV. Parent/Parish Participation

Program Requisite: Each Confirmation preparation program within the Diocese of Lexington will clearly delineate and instruct both parents and parish members as to respective roles and responsibilities.

Rationale: The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechism precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents. (2226)

Further, the *National Directory for Catechesis* states

Parish life itself is an aid to parents because it is here, at the Eucharistic banquet, that parents are nourished by Christ himself. The vibrancy of the parish community, the beauty of worship, and the example of generous love and service of parishioners strengthens parents in the faith. (p. 235)

Guidelines for addressing the Program Requisite:

In discerning the level of involvement of parents and parish it is necessary to be aware of the age and aptitude of the candidates. Though most of the responsibilities are the same across all age levels, there is some variation, but all ages of candidates look to parents and their parish family for direction, wisdom, instruction and example.

Parent Involvement

The parent(s) of the Confirmation candidate is/are responsible for:

1. Providing the primary formation in the Catholic faith through family prayer and through examples of Christian life lived out at home and in the community
2. Supporting the candidate during the preparation process by
 - a. Faithfully attending Sunday liturgy and Holy Days of Obligation with the candidate
 - b. Sharing their own faith journey
 - c. Prioritizing attendance at the parish formation sessions by making sure the candidate's schedule is free of other commitments and making sure they have transportation to and from events so they are able to be on time
 - d. Participating in preparation sessions, retreats, liturgies, and service opportunities when requested and attending all parent sessions

IV. Parent/Parish Participation (continued)

- e. Participating with the candidate in the choosing of a sponsor and making sure that the sponsor is aware of activities, liturgies, and his/her responsibilities as a sponsor and mentor
- f. Helping the candidate understand the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation in their ongoing faith development

Parish Involvement

The parish is responsible for:

1. Providing, supporting, and encouraging catechists who are trained and knowledgeable about Catholicism and who are willing to walk with and support the candidates and their parents on the journey
2. Supplying the candidates and catechists with all necessary materials to complete the process
3. Providing ongoing catechesis for candidates, catechists, parents and sponsors. This would include an understanding of the history and theology of Confirmation, the Rite of Confirmation, the other Sacraments of Initiation and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit
4. Providing parish community rituals that bring all the faithful together in welcoming, supporting and recognizing each candidate as a member of the church such as:
 - a. Mirroring the RCIA in a blessing of the candidates, parents, and sponsors at the beginning of the process, a recognition of their commitment at the end of the process, and a period of mystagogy
 - b. Participating in a communal Reconciliation service prior to the Rite of Confirmation
 - c. Sending notes of encouragement and prayer
 - d. Including candidates in the Prayers of the Faithful at times throughout the year
 - e. Asking each candidate and family to bring up the gifts at a weekend liturgy
 - f. Providing opportunities for and encouraging activities and service for the candidates, their parents, and their siblings

“Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of right judgment and courage,
the spirit of knowledge and reverence,
the spirit of holy fear in God’s presence.

Guard what you have received.

God the Father has marked you with his sign;

Christ the Lord has confirmed you
and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts.”

- St. Ambrose

V. Sponsor

Program Requisite: Each Confirmation preparation program within the Diocese of Lexington will provide for the proper formation of candidate sponsors.

Rationale: The role of the sponsor is integral to the formation of the Confirmation candidate. A sponsor should have a clear understanding of the responsibility he or she is undertaking. This person must be in a position to provide a good role model for the candidate and encourage the candidate in making faith formation primary in his/her life.

Guidelines for addressing the Program Requisite:

Canon Law stipulates the following requirements regarding Sponsors for Baptism and/or Confirmation which should be provided at the time of registration for the Confirmation Program in order for the candidate to be awarded time to give prayerful consideration as to who might be the best person to fill this role:

Can. 874 §1 To be admitted to undertake the office of sponsor, a person must:

1° be appointed by the candidate for baptism [confirmation – see Can 893 on p. 15], or by the parents or whoever stands in their place, or failing these, by the parish priest or the minister; to be appointed the person must be suitable for this role and have the intention of fulfilling it;

2° be not less than sixteen years of age, unless a different age has been stipulated by the diocesan Bishop, or unless the parish priest or the minister considers that there is a just reason for an exception to be made;

3° be a catholic who has been confirmed and has received the blessed Eucharist, and who lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken;

4° not labour under a canonical penalty, whether imposed or declared;

5° not be either the father or the mother of the person to be baptized.

Can. 892 As far as possible the person to be confirmed is to have a sponsor. The sponsor's function is to take care that the person confirmed behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfils the duties inherent in this sacrament.

Can. 893 §1 A person who would undertake the office of sponsor must fulfill the conditions mentioned in can. 874.

§2 It is desirable that the sponsor chosen be the one who undertook this role at baptism.

V. Sponsor (continued)

Other **Diocesan guidelines** for selection of Sponsors are:

- ✠ Sponsors are practicing Roman Catholics – practicing in this context means the sponsor is:
 - a registered member of a Catholic Parish
 - a regular participant at Sunday Mass
 - involved in some regular form of time/talent at their parish
 - a regular contributor to the financial needs of their parish
- ✠ Sponsors are able to provide a verification from their parish as to the above criteria
- ✠ Sponsors are to attend an orientation program that provides material and information about the Confirmation Preparation program as is appropriate for the parish
- ✠ Sponsors are to have regular contact/meetings with their candidate throughout the confirmation preparation (person-to-person, via email, via phone, etc.) as stipulated by their parish program guidelines
- ✠ Sponsors are willing to participate in any parish function as stipulated by the parish program agenda
- ✠ Sponsors are to attend the Confirmation practice and Confirmation Mass

Note: Candidates are to make available to the coordinator of their parish program for Confirmation Preparation their Sponsor's name and contact information early enough in the program for the Sponsor to play a vital role.

Note: If a Sponsor is **unable to comply** with the aforementioned guidelines, candidates are to **consult** with the coordinator of the Confirmation preparation program and/or the pastor of the parish in order to discuss other possibilities for the participation of the Sponsor such as employing a **proxy** and/or assigning a member of the parish to act as a **mentor** to the candidate in lieu of a Sponsor unable to be present or maintain frequent contact with the candidate.

VI. Catechist Formation

Program Requisite: Each Confirmation preparation program within the Diocese of Lexington, KY will institute an intentional and conscientious process for selecting catechists for preparation programs and will provide formation to these catechists that facilitates an organized, systematic, and solid approach to sacramental preparation *in addition to* the existing requirements of the catechist certification program.

Rationale: The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a clear rationale for this requisite:

Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life. (5)

The response then to a call to share in the Catechetical Ministry of the Church includes willingness to give time and talent not only to catechizing others, but to one's own continued growth in faith and understanding.

Guidelines for addressing the Program Requisite:

1. Identification of criteria for the selection of catechists and implementation of a screening process that includes **Virtus** training for catechist candidates.

The call to the ministry of catechist is a vocation, an interior call, a beckoning by the Holy Spirit. Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal worship and life of the Church and who have been prepared for their apostolate by appropriate catechetical training. Their commissioning by the Church is a participation in the divine calling to teach as Jesus did.

The spiritual life of a catechist should be characterized by:

-  A love of God
-  Authenticity of life characterized by their faithful practice of the faith
-  Personal prayer
-  Dedication to the evangelizing mission of the Church
-  Missionary zeal fully convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith
-  Active participation in their local parish community
-  A devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist and Mary
(NDC, Ch. 8, B, #8)

Positive qualities in catechist candidates should be:

-  Faith that manifests itself in their piety and daily life
-  Love for the Church and communion with its pastors
-  Apostolic spirit and missionary zeal
-  Love for others and a willingness to give generous service
-  Sufficient education
-  The respect of the community
-  The human, moral and technical qualities
(NDC, Ch. 8, B, #55)

VI. Catechist Formation (continued)

Other qualities candidates for catechists should possess include:

- ✧ Creativity
- ✧ Interpersonal skills
- ✧ Experience with the age group they will be teaching
- ✧ Experience/skills for facilitating groups
- ✧ Commitment to their own ongoing formation

Things to keep in mind:

- a. The challenges of staffing religious education programs and sacramental preparation programs can sometimes lead us to gratefully accept anyone willing to volunteer. While this is understandable, we must always strive to exercise care and due diligence in selecting catechists. Numbers are never a substitute for quality.

The identification of qualities necessary for the ministry of catechesis and the intentional implementation of and commitment to a formal selection process will help parishes to ensure candidates and their families of quality formation.

- b. The validity of a person's call should be explored during the selection process. Accepting uncritically a person's desire to be a catechist as the sole validation of that person's call to be a catechist is not the ideal.

At times, certain persons may wish to gain an audience or opportunity to spread their version of the truth to others. In some cases, this desire takes the form of volunteering as catechists as this grants them both a captive audience and an opportunity to form young minds to their way of seeing the world.

Asking questions aimed at uncovering any possible agenda should be asked during an interview. For example, questions like "Why do you believe you have been called to this ministry?" or "If you could communicate only one thing to your students, what would it be?" can help reveal possible red flags.

VI. Catechist Formation (continued)

2. A Formal Orientation Meeting should be held in advance of any preparation program beginning.

Parishes will need to schedule a formal orientation meeting for those catechists charged with teaching in the Confirmation preparation program. The agenda for this meeting should include the following:

- ✧ The **Diocesan Guidelines for Confirmation Preparation** will be explored and explained during this session so as to set the expectations, explain the rationale behind policies/practices, and make clear the catechetical content that is to be covered
- ✧ The **Syllabus** prepared by the DRE/CRE/PLD/Pastor will be explained. This syllabus should provide the outline and flow of the content to be covered while allowing flexibility in how a particular topic is presented to the catechist
- ✧ A brief review of the **Textbook(s)** to be used
- ✧ The dates should be set for the catechists to complete the requirements for the **certification area** of Catechetical Studies (if not already done) through the *Echoes of Faith* video series **prior** to the beginning of preparation classes. These videos are entitled as follows and are available through the Media Center at the Catholic Center and RCL Benzinger publications: *The Person of the Catechist, Introduction to the Learner, and Methods* (appropriate to the age group in the preparation class)
- ✧ The date should be set for the **Follow-up Meeting**. This **Follow-up Meeting** should take place after the Orientation Meeting and the completion of the *Echoes of Faith* video courses. The purpose of this meeting is to give the catechists the opportunity to ask questions and share ideas for making the preparation classes as beneficial as possible for the candidates.

3. Completion of the Catechist Formation Checklist

The Catechist Formation Checklist (see Appendix) must be completed, dated, and signed by the DRE/CRE, Pastor, or Parish Life Director **if** Catechist Certification is sought for the *Echoes of Faith* series. This checklist is then to be submitted to the Office of Religious Education for the Diocese of Lexington.

Additional Options for Addressing the Program Requisite:

1. Attendance at the annual Catechist Conference held by the Diocese
2. Attendance at other workshops throughout the Diocese and state
3. Enrichment/Continuing Education through courses offered by the University of Dayton Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation
4. Hosting a Day of Reflection for your Catechists
5. Catechist Enrichment Nights incorporated perhaps into a potluck format

VII. Relationship with the Bishop

Program Requisite: Each Confirmation preparation program within the Diocese of Lexington, KY will offer opportunities for the candidate(s) to be introduced to the Bishop, to communicate with the Bishop, to hear the Bishop in his role as teacher, and to otherwise spend time with the Bishop.

Rationale: The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a clear rationale for this requisite:

In the first centuries Confirmation generally comprised one single celebration with Baptism, forming with it a “double sacrament,” according to the expression of St. Cyprian. Among other reasons, the multiplication of infant baptisms all through the year, the increase of rural parishes, and the growth of dioceses often prevented the bishop from being present at all baptismal celebrations. In the West the desire to reserve the completion of Baptism to the bishop caused the temporal separation of the two sacraments. (1290)

The practice of the Eastern Churches [which have preserved the unity of the two sacraments] gives greater emphasis to the unity of Christian initiation. That of the Latin Church more clearly expresses the communion of the new Christian with the bishop as guarantor and servant of the unity, catholicity and apostolicity of his Church, and hence the connection with the apostolic origins of Christ’s Church. (1292)

It is in this spirit of communion with the Bishop as expressed through the Latin Church that we are asking parishes to prepare the ground through intentional programs and/or practices. The more that can be done to foster a relationship with our Bishop prior to the celebration of the sacrament, the more meaningful the celebration will be for the candidates. Further, the relationship with the Bishop provides a wonderful opportunity to emphasize and foster the candidates’ sense of connectedness to the greater Roman Catholic Church.

Guidelines for addressing the Program Requisite:

1. Candidate Letters to the Bishop

This practice encourages the candidates to reflect on why it is they want to receive the sacrament. By articulating the reasons for wanting to receive the sacrament, candidates can gain a deeper understanding of their own faith life and can develop a greater sense of ownership/participation in what is about to take place. The Bishop also enjoys this practice and gains valuable insight into the personalities and thought-processes of the candidates. This adds a sense of familiarity to the celebration of the sacrament thereby contributing to a feeling of communion.

Content:

Letters to the Bishop should reflect the individual character and style of each candidate. While honoring the letters as unique expressions, the following three topics should be worked into the letter’s body:

1. **Biographical Information** - The candidate should introduce themselves to the Bishop, i.e. who are they? how old they are? what grade they are in? what parish they belong to? who are their family members?

VII. Relationship with the Bishop (continued)

2. **Description of Preparation** – The candidate needs to communicate to the Bishop how he or she has prepared for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation.
3. **Personal Meaning** – The candidate should reflect on what the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation means to them.
4. **Confirmation Name** – The candidate should indicate their choice of name and the reason for this choice. Candidates may choose to use their baptismal name. However, there is value in choosing to use a different name:
 - a. A change in name represents a change in status. For example, the Pope takes a new name upon his election; Members of royalty often change names once they assume the throne. Likewise, Confirmation marks a change in the status of the candidate who becomes a fully initiated Catholic Christian. The taking of a Confirmation name, if presented in its richness, can help signify this new relationship to the Church.
 - b. The candidate establishes a relationship with the saint whose name he or she takes. This saint then becomes an intercessor before God on the candidate's behalf and a patron for the candidate. In short, it is another way of fostering the candidate's relationship with the Church, both on earth and in heaven.
 - c. Finally, in the process of choosing a name, the candidate learns about the life of a saint and acquires a role model for a holy life.

Things to keep in mind:

a. Legibility

In the event that the letters to the Bishop are handwritten by the candidates, catechists should check them for legibility. While we respect and affirm the position of those catechists who feel that the letter is a private matter between the candidate and the Bishop, a letter that cannot be read is of no real value in establishing a relationship between the candidate and the Bishop. Therefore, catechists do not have to read the letter, but catechists should give the letter a quick glance to determine its legibility.

b. Pelagianism

Pelagianism designates a fifth century heresy named after Pelagius, its most prominent proponent. It was a teaching that denied the existence of original sin as well as Christian grace.

In short, this heresy taught that believers could know the good and work out their own salvation through their own effort and will without the grace freely given by God, i.e. salvation was something to be earned and merited without the necessity of God's grace.

In candidate letters to the Bishop, traces of Pelagian thought most commonly appear in the form of the candidate indicating that he/she believes Confirmation has been *earned* through the completion of service hours and required class work (ex. "I believe I should be confirmed because I have...").

VII. Relationship with the Bishop (continued)

The error of Pelagianism can be avoided by emphasizing that the gift of Confirmation is just that – a gift freely given by God out of love. We do not earn Confirmation nor are we capable of doing anything to merit such an expression of Divine Love.

c. The Purpose is Relationship

These letters are designed to establish and build a relationship with the Bishop. They are not intended to convince the Bishop to confer the sacrament, an approach that would imply the candidate merits the sacrament in some way (again a Pelagian tendency).

Instead, candidates should be encouraged to reflect more deeply on what the sacrament means to them and their life rather than viewing the letter as a “case” for the sacrament.

2. Meeting with the Bishop Prior to the Celebration of the Sacrament

It has become a regular practice in the Diocese of Lexington that the Bishop meets with the candidates prior to the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Commonly, parishes will host this meeting and incorporate a dinner into the event. In any case, at least **40 minutes** should be reserved exclusive of any dinner for the Bishop to meet with the candidates.

This pre-sacrament meeting allows the candidates to meet the Bishop in a more personal atmosphere thereby facilitating the development of a sense of relatedness between the Bishop and the candidates.

In the course of this meeting, the Bishop gives the candidates an opportunity to ask him questions. Catechists might mention this to their candidates so that if a good question is asked by a candidate during a preparation session, the catechist might make the suggestion that the candidate “ask the Bishop that question when you meet him.”

Additional Options for Addressing the Program Requisite: It is hoped that parishes will take advantage of some of these other opportunities for fostering the relationship between the candidates and the Bishop. Parishes are also encouraged to come up with other ideas.

1. Special Celebrations of the Mass

a. **Chrism Mass**

- i. Attendance at this Mass is **HIGHLY** recommended for Confirmation candidates because of its connection to their celebration – the chrism oil that they will receive will be blessed at this Mass.

- b. Ordinations to the Priesthood/Diaconate
- c. Anniversary Masses
- d. The Rite of Election Mass

VII. Relationship with the Bishop (continued)

Each of these celebrations serves to bring together the larger Diocesan Church and is celebrated by the Bishop. Consequently, candidates will have the opportunity to experience the Bishop as priest, speaker and teacher. Furthermore, these special celebrations are excellent catechetical opportunities for the candidates to gain a deeper understanding of the ritual life of the Church.

Another advantage to candidate participation in these celebrations is the reception that generally follows. These receptions provide candidates with the chance to introduce themselves to the Bishop as candidates and thereby initiate and/or continue to deepen their relationship with the Bishop.

2. Town Hall Meetings

Periodically, the Bishop visits each of the six regions in the Diocese of Lexington to meet with the parishioners of that region. Dubbed as Town Hall Meetings, the intent is to allow the Bishop hear and respond to the special needs and concerns of the particular region hosting the meeting.

Having your candidates for Confirmation attend one of these meetings is an excellent way to introduce them to the Bishop in a different setting. They will be afforded the chance to experience the Bishop as the leader of the Lexington faithful and as teacher. They will also gain insight into the issues of the Church in their region that will, in turn, help them to feel more connected to the larger Church.

For a schedule of upcoming Town Hall meetings, contact the Office of the Bishop.

3. Diocesan Youth Events – e.g. Youth Rally

The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry frequently sponsors events at the diocesan level. The Bishop attends most of these events and thus candidates would have yet another opportunity to see and speak with the Bishop in a different setting. For more information about upcoming events, contact the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry at 859-253-1993.

4. Open House at the Bishop's Office and the Catholic Center?

Candidates would be afforded the opportunity to see where the Bishop works and to learn about how the Bishop spends his day. Candidates would also meet the diocesan staff to learn about the different roles and ministries.

Appendix

Date Completed

1. _____ Catechist Screened
2. _____ Orientation Meeting covering:
 - Diocesan Guidelines for Confirmation Preparation
 - Course Syllabus prepared by DRE/CRE, Pastor or Parish Life Director
 - Review of textbook(s) to be used
 - Dates for completion of the certification area of Catechetical Studies
 - Dates for the Follow-up Meeting
3. _____ "The Person of the Catechist" video course by catechist
4. _____ "Introduction to the Learner" video course by catechist
5. _____ "Methods" video course by catechist
6. _____ Follow-up Meeting

Signature of DRE/CRE, Pastor,
Or Pastoral Life Director

Date

In order to facilitate the recording of credit for Catechist Certification, please return this completed form along with the names and address information of the catechists to:

Director of Religious Education
Catholic Diocese of Lexington
1310 W Main St
Lexington, KY 40508